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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 004042

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TAGS: PGOV TU POLITICAL PARTIES

SUBJECT: TURKISH OPPOSITION PARTIES: DEVELOPMENTS ON THE LEFT

Classified By: POL Counselor John W. Kunstadter, for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

THIS IS A JOINT AMEMBASSY ANKARA/AMCONSUL ADANA CABLE.

¶11. (C) Summary. Turkey's three main left-of-center parties have been unable to mount a serious challenge to the governing AKP. The left-of-center parties share similar ideologies and compete for the same minor segment of the Turkish electorate but are unable to cooperate and are plagued by political infighting. The parties are also seriously limited by a tradition of authoritarian leadership and an elitist unwillingness to engage in the unglamorous work of grassroots party building. End Summary.

¶12. (C) AKP remains the most popular of Turkey's political parties. The party has made important political and tactical mistakes over the past several months, but the opposition parties have been unable to capitalize on AKP's missteps. The Republican People's Party (CHP) is not only fighting itself, but also fighting with the two other left-of-center parties: the Social Democratic People's Party (SHP), and the Democratic Left Party (DSP). All have very similar ideologies. Their differences are largely rooted in the historical struggles between personalities and factions vying for the leadership of the Turkish left. The three parties are competing for the same 20-30 percent of the Turkish electorate that has traditionally supported "secular", left-of-center parties. Only a single left-of-center party has managed to cross the 10 percent electoral threshold in four of the six national elections since 1983. In the other two national elections, two left-of-center parties crossed the threshold.

TURMOIL CONTINUES IN THE REPUBLICAN PEOPLE,S PARTY (CHP)

¶13. (C) Despite their steadfast opposition to AKP and their fear that AKP is trying to undermine the "secular" republic's status quo, main opposition CHP continues its internecine struggle. In the aftermath of the January 2005 leadership dust-up, Chairman Baykal has launched a purge against his opponents within the party, according to several Embassy sources. He is systematically removing all CHP leaders who supported his main rivals, CHP Sisli mayor Sarigul or CHP MP Livaneli, for the party chairmanship. Baykal has already removed 23 of the 81 provincial party chairmen and purged an additional 250 sub-provincial party leaders, according to former CHP MP Ersoy Bulut. Forty-one CHP MPs signed a statement condemning Baykal's removal of the popular chairman of Izmir province.

¶14. (C) In January, Baykal promised that the party would hold another convention in the fall of 2005 and that he would not run as a candidate, but several Embassy contacts believe that Baykal will either cancel the October convention or run again. Baykal continues to lay the groundwork for his control of the party whether or not he holds a convention. As he has done repeatedly in the past to retain control of the party, Baykal has registered 5,000 new, loyal party members in Izmir province in an effort to keep this large, "rebellious" province in line.

¶15. (C) Several CHP MPs have told us that around fifty of CHP's 159 MPs no longer attend parliamentary party meetings. Five party members have already defected to SHP and three others have defected to the liberal, center-right Motherland Party (ANAP). Several Embassy contacts with connections to CHP and SHP predict that 20-60 CHP MPs may leave the party over the next several months, especially if Baykal does not step down in October or if SHP appears to build momentum. Generally reliable, dissident CHP contacts like MP Hasan Aydin and former state minister Erol Cevik, however, predict that only a trickle of MPs will leave the party.

SHP BITES CHP'S ANKLES

¶16. (C) The defection of five CHP MPs to the SHP has added new life to a small party. (Comment. Later on, one of the five SHP MPs defected again, this time to the Motherland Party (ANAP). End Comment.) The current SHP

is the second incarnation of a party with the same name. The first SHP existed from 1987 to 1995. It was the second or third largest party in parliament and formed a coalition government at one point with the center-right True Path Party (DYP). In 1995, however, SHP merged with CHP. The second SHP was formed in 2001 when several CHP members defected from the party over concerns that Baykal had become too dictatorial. SHP failed to pass the 10 percent electoral threshold in 1999 and 2002.

¶17. (C) SHP Secretary General Cafer Yuksel describes his party as a contemporary social democratic party that seeks to combine modern social democracy with Turkish social-economic and constitutional realities and a respect for the Ataturkist elements of the state. He admits that SHP's ideology is similar to CHP's and asserts that there are many "good people" still in CHP. According to Yuksel, most SHP members were people who had been members of CHP but left because of Baykal's excessive authoritarianism and their desire to create a truly internally democratic social democratic party. Other Embassy contacts, including former SHP secretary general Fikri Saglar, claim that SHP's leadership is already moving in an authoritarian direction. The party's public image was badly damaged in 2002 when SHP flirted with an electoral alliance with a pro-Kurdish party. According to Saglar, the SHP's grassroots supported the merger, but party leader Murat Karayalcin blocked it.

DSP WAITING TO MAKE ITS MOVE

¶18. (C) Democratic Left Party (DSP) Secretary General Tayfun Icli says his party is not a social democratic party like CHP and SHP, but a "nationalistic, leftist, secular, and democratic" party. DSP won the 1999 election with 22 percent of the vote, but the party's popularity was decimated by corruption allegations, the twin economic shocks of 2000 and 2001, and then-PM ecevit's frailty. In the 2002 election, DSP received less than two percent of the vote. DSP leaders do not expect DSP to come back to parliament anytime soon. DSP VP Huseyin Pazarci is not optimistic about DSP returning to parliament after the next election. He believes it will take time for CHP to fully discredit itself, after which left-of-center voters would return to DSP. SecGen Tayfun and DSP VP Ahmet Tan, moreover, do not expect many CHP MPs to defect to DSP. The previous DSP-led coalition government was brought down by defections from DSP, so those who remain in the party have a strong aversion to accepting MPs defecting from other parties.

¶19. (C) Comment. For a number of reasons, Turkish center-left opposition political parties have been unable to capitalize on the inertia, missteps, and problems confronting Erdogan and the AKP. The major reason is that the public views them as vehicles for elitist, authoritarian, and self-serving politicians who have failed in the past, either because of corruption or poor performance in government.

¶10. (C) Comment, contd.: A second major reason for the left-of-center opposition's failure is its refusal to engage in the unglamorous work of retail, grassroots party building. AKP focuses precisely on this grassroots work, giving it a huge organizational advantage over its rivals. Finally, left-of-center parties have failed to overcome the traditional lack of intra-party democracy in Turkey. While AKP suffers from the same defect, internal party reform could breathe new life into parties on the left. As things stand, party members are promoted for unthinking loyalty to the party leader, not for innovation or political skill. This contributes to tactical and ideological stagnation, and attenuates the center-left's ability to mount a serious challenge to AKP. End Comment.
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